



# Cultural Policy and Urban Development

Lessons from medium sized cities in the Baltic Sea Region

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Cities of the Baltic Sea  
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#### Front cover photo

Circus performance in Lappeenranta, Finland  
(Photographer: Vesa Mikkonen)

## • Introduction

Cultural policies, projects and events are as varied as are definitions of the word culture, which can refer to norms and values, symbols and actions, life styles, as well as to cultural products such as films or fashion. In addition, cultural policies, projects and events are very diverse in terms of sources of finance, as well as their symbolic value for the city. In the present study, conducted within the MECIBS project, the discussion of culture focuses on local cultural policies and the official administration of culture.

While EU, national, and provincial administrations play a central role in setting the framework for cultural policies, the local level is of particular relevance as it plays a crucial role in providing, facilitating and co-ordinating cultural services and activities. Culture as a policy sector was established as a governmental responsibility in most countries in the 1970s. Cultural policy usually deals with the fine and performing arts, but may also include leisure activities, tourism and the preservation of historic monuments.

Local authorities make use of a variety of cultural policy strategies, dependent on local conditions, and local cultural policies are often closely tied to urban development, economic and social objectives. Support for »flagship« projects as well as high-profile events and festivals and the revitalisation of public space are considered to be particularly important when it comes to inner-city regeneration strategies. Increasing the attractiveness of a city and improving the city image as a means of achieving economic goals also plays an important role. Culture is thus understood and strategically used by local authorities as a soft location factor for investors, and as an attraction in the form of cultural and leisure industries for tourists.

Some authors have criticised the strategies associated with project-oriented urban cultural policies: although they are capable of producing short-term economic gains, in most cases,

#### *Mönchenkirche, Jüterbog*

*The Monks' Church is part of the future »Kulturquartier Mönchenkirche«. After decades of disintegration, first renovations on the Franciscan monastery and Monks' Church had been undertaken as early as 1980. (Photo: Eric Tenz, 2005)*

they are not able to contribute to the long-term sustainable regeneration of cities. In this context, »urban creativity« has become a key word, since the 1990s, for describing holistic measures through which cultural policy aims to support the »creative potential« as well as the activation, participation and integration of different segments of the population.

Until now, the effects of cultural policy strategies on urban development have been discussed mainly in relation to bigger cities. Thus, the present study looks at approaches that might be promising for smaller cities as well. The objective of this study is to expose the extent to which local authorities from the MECIBS network use cultural policy to achieve urban development objectives which are above and beyond the usual reach of cultural policy, the specific strategies involved, and the ways in which these strategies are applied. The result of these practical examples should encourage an exchange of ideas and good-practices between small and medium-sized cities in the Baltic Sea Region, as well as between stakeholders at all levels of governance.

## • Cultural policy in historic town centres

### **Jüterbog (Germany)**

Jüterbog is located 60 km southwest of Berlin in the Federal State of Brandenburg. The town has about 13,700 inhabitants (2002) and is suffering from demographic and economic decline, as well as job-losses following the German reunification. Political and administrative strategies focus on Jüterbog's historic city centre with its well-retained building

stock, and consider it to be the most important potential in the current urban regeneration process.

In Jüterbog, cultural policies are strongly orientated towards built culture and heritage preservation. Therefore, one of the central goals of the Jüterbog administration is to transform the city into a centre for culture and tourism. This strategy is aligned in its content with the objectives of Brandenburg State. Besides ensuring a high quality of life, the State sees investment in (built) culture as an important part of the structural development policy as it contributes to the development of the tourism industry.

Yet the most central project for the city's rejuvenation is the renovation of the Franciscan Convent and Monks' Church, dating from the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. By concentrating various important institutions (i.e. the town library, theatre, meeting rooms, concert hall, town museum) in the area of the Kulturquartier Mönchenkirche (Monks' Church Cultural Quarter), the city hopes to establish a cultural centre of wide-reaching importance.

The costs of renewing the Kulturquartier Mönchenkirche are covered by the EU, national and State governments, and 20 % of the building costs are paid for by the City. Official inauguration is planned for August 2005. The association »Friends of the Monks' Church Cultural Quarter« was founded to support cultural life in the city, increase the acceptance and attractiveness of local cultural offerings and sustain the institution. The key tasks and objectives of this Society are to network local actors who support the Cultural Quarter, to research, document and disseminate knowledge on the Monks' Church and Franciscan



Monastery, to organize cultural events, and to take responsibility for the service, sale and marketing activities relating to the Monks' Church Cultural Quarter. The rebuilding of the Church was the impetus for the foundation of the Society. This ambitious building project has encouraged people to participate in the creation of something new. However, one central problem appears to be the tight personnel and financial capabilities of the Cultural Quarter, a problem that limits its ability to effectively market its institutions and events. All in all, the first steps in Jüterbog have been taken, but the city needs a long breath to achieve its ambitious goals.

### Kuldiga (Latvia)

Kuldiga is located 160 km west of Riga in the Kurzeme Region and has about 13,500 inhabitants (2002). Kuldiga struggles to cope with changes in institutional structures, the economic and labour markets as well as the decline of the population resulting from the end of the Soviet Union. As most inner city buildings were left derelict at the end of the Soviet Union period, the physical renewal of the city, particularly with regards to the historically rich and intact building structure, has been placed at the top of the municipal agenda. But, mainly due to a lack of financial resources, urban renewal in Kuldiga is a slow process. Currently, there is no national or regional funding for urban renewal in Latvia. The EU is the main provider of infrastructure subsidies.

In Kuldiga, there is a clear awareness of the potential the historic building stock in the inner city centre represents for urban development. If a broad understanding of culture includes areas such as architecture and heritage preservation, there is a clear interplay between the present local cultural policy and urban development policy in Kuldiga. The main feature of the local cultural policy is the promotion of the city's application for UNESCO World Heritage status.

This strategy corresponds with the cultural policy of Latvia in that it makes the preservation of the national cultural heritage a priority. Recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site is not linked to external funds. Nevertheless, it is expected that this recognition will have positive effects for Kuldiga beyond the preservation of the built and cultural heritage. In particular, politicians and city administra-

tors alike expect that this recognition will increase cultural tourism in Kuldiga. In addition, it is hoped that such recognition could heighten the sensibility of the local population when it comes to appreciating and protecting the built cultural heritage – architecture and landscape – in and around the city, strengthen the position of the city in matters of national political importance and improve the identification of residents with their city. Finally, this recognition is expected to reaffirm the positive image which the city already enjoys.

Kuldiga's application was submitted in December 2004. Kuldiga competes with five other sites in Latvia to be the national candidate for recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site. Regardless of whether Kuldiga will be designated as UNESCO World Heritage site, the application process seems to have helped to move things forward, for example through the development of new building and design guidelines including a comprehensive archive, with photos and information, about each house within the historic city centre.

### Comparative findings

Jüterbog and Kuldiga are two examples of cities in the Baltic Sea Region which are marked by the absence of significant economic and demographic development. Given the fact that both cities have remarkable and well preserved historic buildings and ensembles, the maintenance and restoration of the historic centre appears to be a strategy of high priority in both cities, but has been put in practice in different ways. As the financial basis for this work is usually assured by special urban development funds or EU programmes, the application of such funds is of great significance

in both cities. While Kuldiga tends to distribute the money more equally among its cultural institutions, in Jüterbog there is a concentration of financial resources on one particular cultural project, the Monks' Church. It is hoped that the development of this area as a cultural quarter will provide a variety of benefits such as an improved appeal and visibility of the city.

Despite their many differences, both cities provide examples of project oriented development. There seem to be several advantages with the orientation towards projects and the associated short-term results: high public visibility, effective mobilisation of money as well as other resources, result-oriented policy, and generally a strong momentum for positive overall development.

In both cities, these strategies already seem to be enjoying some success. In Jüterbog, the conversion of the Mönchenkirche has gained significant public attention and has become an object of identification for residents. Many residents view the project positively, which is important as the success of the project is dependent on the support of a broad social network. Participation in the »Friends of the Monks' Church Cultural Quarter« makes it possible for resident to express their ideas and creativity and influence the project. The case of Jüterbog serves as an example for the importance of social networks for developing the creative potential of a city.

In contrast to Jüterbog, such networks, as well as public participation in general, have not yet been actively developed in Kuldiga. The UNESCO application process was mainly the work of politicians and administrators from the city government. Although addi-



#### *The historic town centre of Kuldiga*

*The historic town centre, as well as parts of the surrounding landscape (e.g. the waterfall of river Venta), is to be recognised as a World Heritage site. (Photo: Eric Tenz, 2003)*



nal energies from the city administration were mobilised during the application, for example during the documentation and assessment of the historic substance, additional public participation and discussion was not part of the process. This could pose a problem for the overall acceptance of plans, especially for the historic centre.

Finally, in both Jüterbog and in Kuldiga it is hoped that the restoration of the historic centre will lead to more (cultural) tourism. While tourism infrastructure in Jüterbog is enriched through the additional cultural offerings of the Mönchenkirche, the historic centre (in combination with the attractive surrounding landscape) of Kuldiga has not been coupled with other projects. All in all, both cities have a clear strategy in terms of the preservation of their built heritage, while in Jüterbog, cultural events and institutions seem to be particularly well integrated into this strategy.

### • Cultural policy in former industrial towns

#### Lappeenranta (Finland)

The city of Lappeenranta is located in the south eastern part of Finland, and only about 30 km from the Russian border. With 58,400 inhabitants (2001), Lappeenranta is known primarily as a centre of the pulp and paper industry, and as the administrative centre of the region of South Karelia. Lappeenranta's cultural history is closely linked to the former region of Karelia, which was divided into its present Russian and Finnish segments after World War II. The former cosmopolitan Karelian capital Vyborg (Viipuri) is today located on Russian territory, and, in Finnish South Karelia, a certain nostalgia about the

»loss« of this culturally rich city survives. Today, Lappeenranta is considered to have a huge potential as a meeting place between East and West. Despite the bureaucratic difficulties, there is more and more co-operation taking place between Finnish and Russian cultural institutions, for example between local museums on both sides of the border who share the interest in bringing the common Karelian history to a wider public.

In contrast to cities like Jüterbog or Kuldiga, local cultural policies in Lappeenranta cannot build upon a large and intact historic city centre area. Therefore, the focus lies on events and on the provision of cultural services for the city and the whole region of South Karelia.

Current tendencies in South Karelia, as well as all over Finland, suggest that there is a trend towards a spatial and financial concentration of resources and a reinforcement of the regional role and qualitative offer of local orchestras, theatres, and exhibitions in museums. Nonetheless, the tradition of the Nordic welfare state of providing high quality cultural services and support to small projects in all areas remains strong.

The cultural board of the city council has also become involved in cultural marketing and event strategies, which are clearly linked to economic and tourism objectives and to the aim of contributing to a positive image of the city. Lappeenranta already enjoys a reputation as a friendly and open minded city. This reputation is closely linked to the summer holiday opportunities by the surrounding lakes and forests.

The local cultural strategy is thus seen as an integral part of the local development strategy to further promote Lappeenranta, not only as

#### The fortress area, Lappeenranta

Most local cultural facilities and museums are located in the city's historic fortress area, and numerous cultural festivals and events take place here during summer months.

(Source: Hannu Vallas, 2004)

an administrative centre and a centre of the international forest industry, but also as a good place to live and work. Cultural aspects seem to gain importance as a location factor for attracting inhabitants, investors and tourists. In addition, it is hoped that culture, as an identity bearing element, will contribute to the city's recognition as a cultural centre of the region of South Karelia and Finland.

#### Randers (Denmark)

The city of Randers, traditionally an industrial medium-sized city with 62,200 inhabitants (2001), is located about 40 km north of the city of Århus and about 80 km south of the city of Ålborg. The main challenges facing Randers stem from its history as an industrial town. In order to attract new inhabitants, to promote the quality of life for families, and to overcome its negative image, cultural issues and the quality of local cultural services and events are of increasing importance.

Up until recently, the city had no formal cultural policy, and cultural facilities in Randers tend to be decentralised and not very well-known outside of Randers. Traditionally, the focus of cultural policy has been to provide cultural activities and services for the local population, and indeed, the city has been successful in providing high quality cultural services to its citizens. In Randers, space is provided for a great variety of cultural activities. Smaller local clubs and associations tend to



### Værket, Randers

Opened in 1990 in the buildings of a former electricity generating plant, Værket has been the largest public cultural investment in Randers to date. The building complex holds several auditoriums, a cinema, a theatre, a café, and rehearsal facilities. (Photo: Monika Sonntag, 2004)

ders tries to become known as a cultural city throughout Denmark and be rid of its negative image as an old industrial and violent city.

### Comparative findings

In contrast to the two cities of Jüterbog and Kuldiga, Lappeenranta and Randers are located in Nordic welfare states in which there is a relatively strong tradition of public responsibility and expenditures for cultural services and the cultural sector in general. Lappeenranta and Randers are cities of similar size (around 60,000), are known for their industrial past and have undergone profound economic and social transformation processes during the past decades. They are not particularly known for being culturally rich cities, and the cultural offering in both cities must be characterised as average for cities of their size. This does not mean, though, that there are no outstanding attractions; on the contrary, both cities have excellent museums, well known summer festivals etc.

Both cities are currently in the process of (re-)defining the content and aims of their cultural strategies and the importance they wish to assign culture within their urban development strategies. The current issues of debate and the process of finding their way towards a contingent cultural policy are similar in a number of respects and can be found also in other small and medium-sized cities around the Baltic Sea:

*First*, both cities use culture as an identity and image bearing element, and one can find common cultural policy aims when it comes to image campaigns and their focus on local or regional identity. *Second*, the potential of culture as a location factor is stressed by actors in both cities. They hope to attract tourists, new inhabitants and investors, and have become increasingly aware of the role cultural projects and institutions might play in reaching this aim. *Third*, cultural policies in both cities are closely linked to urban development and planning issues. The creation of »cultural areas« within the city is expected to contribute to the revitalisation of some quarters and possibly of the city as a whole. *Fourth*, both cities have realised that co-operation with the surrounding municipalities is vital in order to assure a cost-effective provision of public services in

use the rooms of the municipality's culture and community centre, Fritidhus, while alternative and multi-cultural activities usually take place in Underværket, a former European Urban Pilot Project, which has become a privately run centre of culture and commerce.

Perhaps most notable is the recent shift towards finding ways for cultural and economic development to go hand-in-hand in the form of public-private partnerships. This convergence of arts and culture with commerce and industry has been promoted by the Danish Government.

Similarly, there has been much discussion about making more funds available for lighthouse projects and to centralise public cultural services, in order to increase visibility and highlight the positive qualities of the city. The largest cultural centre and public cultural investment in Randers to date is Værket, opened in 1990 in the buildings of a former electric plant. A more explicit example of a local facility focusing explicitly on attracting external visitors is the Rainforest, a privately run indoor tropical zoo. Another planned lighthouse project is the »water culture house«, i.e. a swimming hall with wellness facilities, play areas for children and special baths for the disabled.

In general, the city is aware of the fact that while such attractions might be important in changing the city's image to the outside, a lively cultural offering with music schools and small privately organised activities contribute substantially to the city's quality of life and should thus not be neglected in budget allocations. Thus, it is not only through lighthouse projects, but also through small-scale cultural activities and a good quality of life that Ran-

the cultural sector. *Fifth* and finally, both cities are defining the importance they want to give to bigger cultural projects as opposed to smaller and more equally distributed public or private cultural projects. As a result of the state responsibilities for cultural affairs, support for smaller projects is included in the budget and strategies of all Danish, as well as Finnish cities. Both cities are aware of the important contribution of small private projects to the quality of life. In this context, active participation as opposed to cultural consumption is promoted and is an integral part of local cultural policies. Nonetheless, and particularly in Randers, there is a tendency towards focusing on projects that might stand out among other cities and contribute to the city's attractiveness. On the other hand, there is a danger that these cities will remain average in the long term by promoting projects similar to those of neighbouring cities. Therefore, it is vital to focus on those things that are special or unique to the city, while considering local inhabitants rather than external visitors or investors to be the main target group.

In conclusion, both cities are currently in the process of defining a cultural policy which includes economic aims and places a value on lighthouse projects. Their strategy focuses on image building and in-migration in order to strengthen their attractiveness as good locations for business and for living.

### • Conclusions and recommendations

Experiences from the MECIBS cities and findings from the conducted case studies indicate that small and medium-sized cities can use cultural policies effectively, as is also the case for larger cities, to achieve not only cultural goals but also urban development, economic and social objectives. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that cultural policies can only offer some contribution to positive urban development, depending on the particular local context and challenges. In addition, financial resources of cities in the Baltic Sea Region vary greatly, particularly between cities in Eastern Europe and those in the so-called Nordic Welfare States. Therefore, the following recommendations have to be adapted by local stakeholders to the very context and particular situation of their town or city.

*First*, cultural policies should go hand in hand with other political strategies. Towns and cities should consider the fact that culture in all its forms, whether dealing with the built heritage, cultural services, projects or events,

can have important effects on their social and economic development. For some cities, cultural projects and institutions can be a relevant soft location factor for attracting investors and tourists, as well as new inhabitants. In other cities, cultural activities can successfully contribute to inner-city regeneration strategies through the creation of »cultural areas« within the city.

*Second*, there should be a focus on specific local potentials and resources (e.g. personal and financial resources, social and cultural heritage, or the built environment). As endogenous potentials can be distinct, depending on the particular point of view, an open discussion about local potentials is necessary, and consensus over the focus of policy should be reached.

*Third*, the four case-studies clearly indicate that achieving wider goals of urban development through cultural policy is a matter of creativity, integration of key persons and perseverance rather than a matter of money.

*Fourth*, well-grounded, widely supported and reasonably financed cultural projects should be developed. The question whether local investments in culture should be concentrated on large events and central institutions or spread amongst smaller and more equally distributed public and private cultural projects is vital, particularly in the case of small and medium-sized cities, where budgets for cultural affairs are limited compared to those of bigger cities. In some cities, cultural lighthouse projects and high-profile events can be

effectively used as a location factor to make the city known for its specific characteristics and to enhance the city's attractiveness. Nonetheless, the effects of such events should not be overestimated. Local authorities should make sure that lighthouse projects are integrated into people's everyday activities in order to become part of the city's life.

*Fifth*, participation and social networks should be encouraged. In most cases, the long-term success of cultural projects is a matter of public support and the integration of key persons. When offering local people opportunities to become involved in and influence decision-making processes, social networks can significantly contribute to the success of cultural policy (and urban development) concepts, while at the same time promoting the participation and integration of different segments of the population.

*Sixth*, it can be said that the development of sophisticated strategies is of similar importance as is the use of endogenous resources and project-oriented work. These sophisticated strategies have to be embedded in the very context of the towns and cities. Generalisations regarding procedure do not seem to be promising here as the strategies must address the particular problems or weaknesses of the very (institutional, cultural, societal, etc.) system.

*Last*, co-operation with neighbouring cities should be pursued, which will allow for an integration of regional aspects into cultural project planning. Otherwise, if cities pursue projects of similar scale and scope, the cities will

not distinguish themselves but will remain average. In addition, co-operation can ensure a cost-effective provision of public cultural services (e.g. libraries, theatres, music schools) in the region.

In conclusion, it should be emphasised that focusing on local cultural policy can also be a worthwhile exercise for smaller towns and cities. It is also worth looking at what other (larger) cities do in the field of cultural policy and urban development and to consider learning from them. Although resources are often limited, smaller cities can adapt concepts according to their special situations and find their niche for a more successful urban development. The four MECIBS cases show that linking local cultural policies with wider goals of urban development as part of a sophisticated strategy is of great importance. Identifying local endogenous potentials and integrating key persons or »movers and shakers« seems to be promising for more successful local development. As local culture can be considered to be one tool to bring people together, an active cultural policy offers people one opportunity for learning, co-operation as well as social integration. Thus, an active cultural policy can become an important driver of urban development, not only in large cities but also in smaller towns and cities.

**The full study is available in:**

Lang, Thilo; Sonntag, Monika; Tenz, Eric: Small and medium-sized cities in the Baltic Sea Region – Socio-economic and cultural approaches to urban development, Edition Kirchhof und Franke, Leipzig/Berlin 2005, ISBN 3-933816-29-7.

## MECIBS

This folder summarizes the findings of a case study carried out as part of the Interreg IIIB project *Medium Sized Cities in Dialogue Around the Baltic Sea (MECIBS)*.

**Financing:** The partners and EU (Interreg IIIB, Baltic Sea Programme). Supplementary funding obtained from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Baltic Sea Facility) and the Danish Organisation for International Co-operation.

**Aim:** Within the overall objective to foster balanced spatial development by sustaining the development of medium sized cities the project aims at: (1) understanding urban restructuring based on comparative and concrete examples, (2) forming recommendations for the interplay between local and national strategies based upon a bottom up process, (3) forming recommendations within an integrated perspective on economic, environmental and social development and (4) forming a network of medium sized cities to facilitate exchange of experiences and mutual learning.

**MECIBS partners:** GERMANY: Leibniz-Institute for Regional Development and Structural Planning; DENMARK: Municipalities of Randers and Nakskov; Chamber of Commerce and Industry Herning-Ikast-Brande; Centre for Forest, Landscape and Planning, KVL (lead partner); Dep. of Marketing, Southern Denmark University; Dep. of Geography, University of Copenhagen; SWEDEN: Municipality of Nyköping; Dep. of Regional Planning, Royal Institute of Technology; FINLAND: Municipalities of Salo, Kokkola and Lappeenranta; Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Helsinki University of Technology; NORDIC COUNTRIES: Nordic Centre for Spatial Development, Nordregio, Stockholm;

**Associated partners:** GERMANY: Municipality of Jüterbog; SWEDEN: Municipality of Norrtälje; RUSSIA: Municipality of Vyborg Region, Municipalities of Kronstadt and Pskov; Leontief Centre, Sct. Petersburg; ESTONIA: Municipality of Sillamäe; Public Science Academy; LATVIA: Municipalities of Valka, Kuldīga and Bauska; Department of Geography, University of Latvia, Riga; POLAND: Municipality of Chojnice; University of Gdansk.

**More information:** [www.MECIBS.dk](http://www.MECIBS.dk)



Medium Sized Cities in Dialogue  
around the Baltic Sea

## Medium Sized Cities in Dialogue around the Baltic Sea

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ISBN 87-7903-227-3



European Commission  
Structural Funds